



Indiana State Department of Health

Epidemiology Resource Center

Quick Facts

About...Bed bugs

What are bed bugs?

Bed bugs are red-brown, oval-shaped, flattened insects that are about 1/4 inch long. Bed bugs often feed on the blood of humans during the night and then hide in nearby cracks and folds of furniture and walls during the day. Most people have itching, pain and swelling from a bed bug bite within 1 day. These bites can cause a lot of irritation and loss of sleep, but bed bugs do not spread disease.

How are bed bugs spread?

Bed bugs are spread through used furniture that contains bugs or they are moved on items used during travel such as suitcases, outerwear and other belongings. Bugs can then move through a building by crawling or being carried on humans.

Who is at risk for bed bugs?

Bed bugs are often found in large buildings such as apartments, dorms, prisons, hospitals and hotels; they are also found in private homes. Bed bugs can be found anywhere, even in very clean places.

How are bed bugs identified?

Bed bugs can be found by seeing actual bugs, their light-brown skins (shed during molting), dark spots of waste, or blood spots or stains on cloth or walls. When looking for signs of bed bugs; use a flashlight and be sure to carefully check the following areas:

- Along mattress seams
- Under the bottom cover of box springs (where fabric is stapled)
- Behind things on the wall and headboards
- Underneath and inside cracks in furniture
- Cracks in wood molding

- Under the edge of wall to wall carpeting
- Under loose wall paper
- Among clutter stored in closets

There are other bugs that look like bed bugs. Some of these bugs will bite humans and leave signs that look the same. Before you treat for bed bugs, you should make sure you know what kind of bug caused the problem. You should use a professional to find out what kind of bug you have.

What is the treatment for bed bug bites?

Treatment of bed bug bites consists of treating the itching and inflammation from the bites. Medications may be prescribed to help with this or to help prevent infection from scratching.

How are bed bug controlled?

Control of bed bugs is hard and should be done with the help of a pest control professional that knows how and when to use approved insecticides. A pest control professional will look at your home and tell you the best way of dealing with the bugs. This may include the removal of excess clutter and moving furniture away from the walls. You may have to treat more than once and treat rooms next to, above or below the room with bed bugs (sometimes even the entire building).

Items that cannot be treated (like cloths, bedding, toys, and backpacks) will need to be put in bags (to prevent the spread of bed bugs) and then put in the dryer on high heat for at least 20 minutes. Vacuum bags should be sealed in a plastic bag before putting in the trash. You may need to dispose of beds, mattresses and cloth covered furniture. When items are thrown out, bag or wrap them so that bugs do not fall out and label them "bed bug infested" so others won't take them.

How can I prevent bed bug infestations?

Insect repellents do not work against bed bugs. The best ways to prevent bed bugs is to use extra caution when getting used furniture, like mattresses and couches. Avoid taking items that have been left on a curb. When you stay in hotels, check the beds for signs of bed bugs. Keep luggage and other items on luggage racks and away from surfaces and walls. If you think the room has bed bugs tell the hotel front desk. When you get back home put your clothing in disposable plastic bags before you unpack and wash them at once. Luggage may be treated or thrown out if it was exposed to bed bugs.

All information presented is intended for public use. For more information, please refer to: <http://www.extension.entm.purdue.edu/publications/E-249.pdf> or <http://www.ca.uky.edu/entomology/entfacts/ef636.asp>

You may contact the IN State Dept of Health Entomology Lab (317-351-7190), or the Purdue University Plant and Pest Diagnostic Laboratory (765-794-7071) or visit the Purdue University website at: <http://www.ppdI.purdue.edu/ppdI/samples.html> for further information on specimen submission.

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